The boundaries of the state in modern Britain

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1 Introduction: the shifting boundaries of the state in modern Britain

S. J. D. Green and R. C. Whiting

The theme

One of the defining characteristics of twentieth-century British history has been the rise of the state. That we take to mean the transformation of the executive branch of government from a limited system of force into an extensive network of services, at once literally bigger, more self-consciously competent and altogether more intrusive – for good or ill – into the lives of its citizens than ever before.[1] Whatever else can be said about it, this development has not passed unnoticed in our time. Lip-service is paid to it almost daily by politicians, journalists and even ordinary people. Academic colloquia are continually dedicated to its more sophisticated understanding. Books are written about it, often good books too. Studies in the history of government involvement in the organisation and management of Britain's post-war economy have multiplied, almost as this involvement has grown, during the past thirty

[1] 'Until 1914, a sensible, law-abiding Englishman could pass through life and hardly notice the existence of the state, beyond the post-office and the policeman.' A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914–1945* (Oxford, 1965), p. 1. '[W]e have become [by 1987], a "much governed nation", with councils, boards, departments, and authorities of many kinds exercising . . . numerous . . . and extensive . . . powers . . . in the name of social justice and the common good.' W. H. Greenleaf, *The British Political Tradition*, vol. III, part 1, *A Much Governed Nation* (London, 1987), p. 1; *ibid.*, vol. I, *The Rise of Collectivism* (1983), p. 42. The fullest account of the process, in all its ramifications, is found in Greenleaf's three masterly volumes, viz. *The Rise of Collectivism*, *The Ideological Heritage* (1983) and *A Much Governed Nation, parts 1 and 2* (1987); a fourth volume, *The World Outside*, is forthcoming. A very different perspective can be found in James E. Cronin, *The Politics of State Expansion: War, State and Society in Twentieth Century Britain* (London, 1991). For an elegant summary of the literature see José Harris, 'Society and the State in Twentieth Century Britain', in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750–1950*, vol. III, *Social Agencies and Institutions* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 63–177. And, for a simple introduction, Paul Johnson, 'The Role of the State in Twentieth Century Britain', in Johnson (ed.), *Twentieth-Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change* (London, 1994), pp. 476–91.

years.[2] Significant treatises on the rise of publicly managed social and welfare policy scarcely fall far behind.[3] Similarly so for the transformation of political behaviour which these changes entail.[4] Once neglected fields, such as investigation into the impact of, and alterations

[2] The most recent, and fullest, history is now found in Keith Middlemas, *Power, Competition and the State*, vol. I, *Britain in Search of a Balance, 1961–1974* (Basingstoke, 1986), vol. II, *Threats to the Post-War Settlement, 1961–1974* (1990), and vol. III, *The End of the Post-War Era, Britain since 1974* (1991). Other accounts, covering all or part of the period, range from the semi-official to the journalistic; cf., F. T. Blackaby (ed.), *British Economic Policy 1960–74*, National Institute of Economic and Social Research, Economic and Social Studies 31 (Cambridge, 1978), esp. chs. 2 and 14, and Samuel Brittan, *Steering the Economy*, 3rd edn (New York, 1971). The question of post-war state enterprise is treated in William Ashworth, *The State in Business 1945 to the mid-1980s* (London, 1991); and set in wider, historical framework by James Foreman-Peck and Robert Millward, *Public and Private Ownership in British Industry 1820–1990* (Oxford, 1994), chs. 8–11. An essential, polemical work, an economic history of planning which informed the 'Thatcher revolution', is Alan Budd, *The Politics of Economic Planning* (Manchester, 1978), and see esp. the conclusion. For a purely theoretical introduction to the whole phenomenon, see Bruno S. Frey, *Democratic Economic Policy* (Oxford, 1983), esp. part 3.

[3] The most accessible introduction, which meritoriously integrated social with economic policy, is G. C. Peden, *British Economic and Social Policy: Lloyd George to Margaret Thatcher* (Hemel Hempstead, 1991), esp. chs. 6–9. A modern textbook on the welfare state in Britain is Michael Hill, *The Welfare State in Britain: A Political History since 1945* (Aldershot, 1993), *passim*. For a comparative perspective, considering the example of the USA and western Europe additionally, see Douglas E. Ashford, *The Emergence of the Welfare State* (Oxford, 1986), esp. chs. 4–6. Critiques of the whole now range from socialist/feminist to conservative/liberal; see *inter alia*, Lois Bryson, *Welfare and the State* (Basingstoke, 1992), esp. chs. 2 and 4–6, or Digby Anderson (ed.), *The Ignorance of Social Intervention* (London, 1980), *passim*. More notably wide-ranging discussions, expressing several different viewpoints on the matter, are found in S. N. Eisenstadt and Ora Ahimer (eds.), *The Welfare State and its Aftermath* (London, 1985), *passim*; and Thomas and Dorothy Wilson (eds.), *The State and Social Welfare: The Objectives of Policy* (London, 1991), see esp. parts 3 and 5. For a critical account of recent developments in Britain, see Malcolm Wicks, *A Future for All: Do We Need a Welfare State?* (Harmondsworth, 1987), esp. part 2. Individual case studies include Peter Malpass, *Reshaping Housing Policy: Subsidies, Rents and Residentialisation* (London, 1990), esp. chs. 7 and 8; and Carol Walker, *Managing Poverty: The Limits of Social Assistance* (London, 1993), esp. ch. 7.

[4] It is acknowledged, for instance, in the very title of Samuel H. Beer, *Modern British Politics: Parties and Pressure Groups in the Collectivist Age*, 3rd edn (London, 1982), esp. ch. 3. For the particular, and allegedly peculiar, example of the Labour Party, see Barry Jones and Michael Keating, *Labour and the British State* (Oxford, 1985), esp. chs. 4, 6 and 7. On modern 'pressure-group' politics see, *inter alia*, A. G. Jordan and J. J. Richardson, *Government and Pressure Groups in Britain* (Oxford, 1987), esp. part 2; also Richard Rose, *Politics in England: Persistence and Change*, 4th edn (London, 1985), ch. 8, and Max Beloff and Gilliam Peele, *The Government of the UK: Political Authority in a Changing Society*, 2nd edn (London, 1985), ch. 9. And, in many ways, it formed the basis of the 'neo-corporatist' interpretation of modern British politics, fashionable in the 1970s and 1980s; see especially, Keith Middlemas, *Politics and Industrial Society: The Experience of the British System since 1911* (London, 1979), *passim*, and Andrew Cox and Noel O'Sullivan (eds.), *The Corporate State: Corporatism and the State Tradition in Western Europe* (Aldershot, 1988), ch. 9.

in, the application of economic and social expertise in public and even private life now find their niche.[5] And all the time, positive and normative theories of the state, especially the liberal state, and particularly the British liberal state, abound.[6]

In such an over-crowded field, the appearance of yet another book on the state in modern Britain requires some justification. This lies, or strictly speaking begins, with its title. The term 'boundaries' has been carefully chosen to incorporate not merely the contents but also the purposes of this book. For it enables the reader to appreciate the possibility, that is the significant intellectual possibility, of the modern historical phenomenon of retreating as well as of advancing public boundaries. (And in that understanding we include both those concessions which have occurred, and those which might yet come to pass.) More subtly, it also permits him to allow for the probability that what has indubitably expanded, as the state has extended the range of its formal interests – its specific, legally endorsed, concerns in British society – has not necessarily also acquired a concomitant increase in its competence actually to deal with – significantly to alter, to redirect or even to improve – what it now increasingly encounters. Accordingly it is an exercise which allows him to envisage the appropriateness of a history of the state in modern Britain which is, and must always be, a study not simply of its extent but also of its limits, not merely of its growth but also of its degeneration; a consideration, in other words, of its shifting and even of its transforming *boundaries*.

[5] For a general, historical account, see Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London, 1989), chs. 4 and 8. The particular example of economic expertise is covered in Mary O. Furner and Barry Supple (eds.), *The State and Economic Knowledge: The American and British Experiences* (Cambridge, 1990), see esp. chs. 6, 7, 10–12 and 14; a complementary volume on social expertise is Michael J. Lacey and Mary O. Furner, *The State and Social Investigation in Britain and the United States* (Cambridge, 1993), see esp. chs. 1, 6 and 9. The relationship of these developments to the growth of professionalism within the state is discussed in Bob Carter, *Capitalism, Class Conflict and the New Middle Class* (London, 1985), esp. ch. 4; and more widely in the various essays in Rolf Torstendahl and Michael Burrage (eds.), *The Formation of Professions: Knowledge, State and Strategy* (London, 1990). For a wider context still, see W. H. G. Armytage, *The Rise of Technocrats: A Social History* (London, 1965), esp. parts 4 and 5.

[6] Probably the best introduction is now Patrick Dunleavy and Brendan O'Leary, *Theories of the State* (London, 1987), *passim*; an alternative, and rather more historical account is found in John A. Hall and G. John Ikenberry, *The State* (Milton Keynes, 1989), see esp. ch. 2. Critiques of the phenomenon range from the 'Marxist' exposure in Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (London, 1969), see esp. chs. 7 and 8; to the libertarian argument of Anthony de Jasay in *The State* (Oxford, 1985), see esp. ch. 4. Essential readings are presented in David Held *et al.* (eds.), *State and Society* (Oxford, 1983); see esp. part 1. For the British state in historical context see Middlemas, *Power, Competition and the State*, vol. III, conclusion, pp. 447–87.

That said, one thing should be made clear from the outset. To acknowledge any such reversals or failures, even indeed to insist upon a proper understanding of the complexity of the effects, is not to argue for their inherent inevitability, still less desirability. Certainly, there is no need to accept the advantageousness of a diminishing state in order to apprehend that the boundaries of the state have, in fact, retreated in many, very important areas of British life during the twentieth century. After all, in certain respects, particularly as it relates to questions of public doctrine and social morality, this might almost be said to be a characteristic dynamic of modern states.[7] On the other hand, there is no necessary correlation between the pursuit of such limitation(s) and the political complexion of its or their pursuers. So, one of the most important of these concessions discussed below, the power over life and death, was altogether more actively sought on the political left than on the ideological right, in this country as elsewhere.[8] One of the more recent, the retreat of the state from its prohibitory regulation in the lives of homosexual men, similarly so.[9]

One might go further. Even to the degree that such concessions have

[7] A point made in Bryan R. Wilson, 'Morality in the Evolution of the Modern Social System', *British Journal of Sociology*, 36 (1985), 315–32, esp. at pp. 318–24. Whether this is a good or bad thing, of course, is a quite different matter, and indeed constitutes the basic material for the *political* argument between liberal individualists and socialist and/or conservative communitarians in contemporary culture. See, *inter alia*, Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue* (London, 1981), esp. chs. 2–6; and the liberal critique of Macintyre, and other communitarians, gathered together in Stephen Holmes, *The Anatomy of Anti-Liberalism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993); also the wide-ranging discussion, 'pro' and 'con', offered in Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* (Oxford, 1992), *passim*.

[8] The contemporary history of this movement can be consulted, academically, in James B. Christopher, *Capital Punishment and British Politics: The British Movement to Abolish the Death Penalty 1945–57* (London, 1962), esp. ch. 7; and polemically, in the essays collected in Louis Blom-Cooper (ed.), *The Hanging Question: Essays on the Death Penalty* (London, 1969). The important, and changing, *religious* dimension of this struggle is considered in Harry Potter, *Hanging in Judgement: Religion and the Death Penalty in England from the Bloody Code to the Abolition* (London, 1993), esp. chs. 13–15 and 17. For an up-to-date, world-wide survey, see Roger Hood, *The Death Penalty* (Oxford, 1989), chs. 1 and 2.

[9] The fullest *political* account of this movement is probably now Stephen Jeffrey-Poulter, *Peers, Queers and Commons: The Struggle for Gay Law Reform from 1950 to the Present* (London, 1991), see esp. chs. 3, 5 and 12. A wider historical framework is set in Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*, 2nd edn (London, 1989), see esp. chs. 6 and 12–14. Perhaps the most moderate statement for the further liberalisation of the law is offered in Anthony Grey, *Quest for Justice: Towards Homosexual Emancipation* (London, 1992), *passim*. For a philosophical consideration of the problem, with practical implications, see Michael Ruse, *Homosexuality: A Philosophical Enquiry* (Oxford, 1988), esp. chs. 8–10; and for different arguments, with different implications, see Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire: A Philosophical Investigation* (London, 1986), chs. 9 and 10.

been made, they have neither always presumed, nor actually entailed any increase in, or even restoration of, personal freedom and individual responsibility. Think of the very recent and speedily developing privatisation of punishment (the prison service) in this country. Ignore, for the moment, whether or not this will prove to be for the good of the criminal and to the benefit of the taxpayer. What it indubitably is – it could be no other – is an example of the willingness of the contemporary British state to trade one of the most basic expressions of its historically acquired authority – the exclusive right to coerce – for one of the more recent calculi of its continuing legitimacy – the willingness to do its public duty for the least possible expense. No criticism of that policy is implied in the observation that it has been done in a way, and to an end, that is entirely unconcerned about the continuing vigour, or otherwise, of Britain's law-abiding citizenry.[10]

All of which is perhaps no more than a long-winded way of saying that the boundaries of the state in modern Britain are far from obvious, either by nature or in direction. Still less clear has been the degree to which their identification and development have been sustained by a coherent doctrine of the state, and of its proper responsibilities, during the modern era. And, in so far as the state really has grown in this period, this uncertainty suggests three critical questions about the particular character of the state of its activities, in modern Britain: first, how far have these developments of state responsibility been adequately, or even coherently, justified by concomitant developments in the general political culture and according to specific intellectual dogmas of the time? Secondly, what have been the implications for the authority of the state of the exponential growth of particular professional expertise in key areas of interest? And thirdly, what (if any) have been the connections between the emergence of so many associated fields of scientific and pseudo-scientific 'knowledge' and the programme of a more nebulous, but equally critical, moral authority pertaining to their practitioners to employ that understanding on behalf of the state, and for the common good?

It should go without saying that these are not the only questions worth asking about the rise of the state in modern Britain. Yet surely they are three of the most important. The first points to the putative connection between political democratisation and the growth of public

[10] An intelligent discussion of the narrow question of privatisation can be found in Charles H. Logan, *Private Prisons* (New York, 1990), chs. 2, 3 and 14; and a wider consideration of the related social problem in Ira P. Robbins, *The Legal Dimensions of Private Incarceration* (New York, 1988), *passim*. Both concentrate upon the American case, but parallels with the (emerging) British example are obvious.

authority in twentieth-century Britain, both conceived and executed during an era in which Britain very self-consciously became a democratic regime, indeed became one of the world's leading, and certainly one of the world's most stable, liberal democratic polities; and at a time when the political theory of democracy, and also, supposedly, of state welfare as an aspect of that democracy, became more widely entrenched in British intellectual life.[11] The second identifies its direct, and often contradictory corollary: the extent to which the public implementation of these democratic desires (if such they were) actually and necessarily rested upon the particular benevolence of uncommon skill (if such it was).[12] And this third explores the necessary, and contingent, tension between the two: between, as it were, the very obvious sense in which a democratic state rhetorically associates itself with the public good, and the less obvious reality of the means through which it fulfils its presumptively beneficent tasks.[13]

Answers to these questions should illuminate the wider question of the political relationship between the state and the civil society during the same period. Certainly, they should help us to understand the experiences of collective and individual interests in society in their relations with the state. An understanding of these experiences in turn should take us some way towards the goal of properly appreciating the degree to which the relationship between civil society and the state – another way of describing the boundaries of the state – has not merely been uncertain, nor even simply generally perceived to be unclear, but also the uncertain and unclear product as much of the efforts by civil society to negotiate modification and qualifications in *its* relationship with the alternatively over-bearing or beneficial public juggernaut with which it was continuously confronted.

This relationship has significantly changed, both by statutory fiat and through more nebulous civil negotiation, across the widest spectrum of British social life. Accordingly, any study of the boundaries of the state in modern Britain should, properly, be developed across the widest

[11] By which we mean that public welfare became an aspect of political democracy itself. That view is implied in the analysis of Greenleaf, *The British Political Tradition*, vol. I, ch. 4. For the political theory underpinning this view see, *inter alia*, Anthony Arblaster, *Democracy* (Milton Keynes, 1987), ch. 7; or, for its attempted repudiation, Brian Crozier, *The Minimum State: Beyond Party Politics* (London, 1979), ch. 2.

[12] Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society*, ch. 8. For a comparative perspective see Charles Derber, William A. Schwartz and Dale Magrass, *Power in the Highest Degree: Professionals and the Rise of a New Mandarin Order* (New York, 1990), esp. part 5.

[13] As above, the question of what the public good consisted and consists in, conceived *a priori*, we leave unanswered. By this we do not imply that it is not, has not been, and cannot be, a matter of public concern.

practicable range of subjects. These include those obviously and unambiguously important areas such as the economy and social policy, but they are not restricted to them. They also include, for instance, the apparently more nebulous fields of religion and morality. The British state, after all, remains an Established order. And its ecclesiastical arm, however ineffectually, still embodies its defining – if not necessarily its prevailing – ethical dimension. Finally, they include the seemingly marginal concerns of warfare and rebellion. The British state, uniquely amongst the western democracies, still deploys its own troops routinely in order to police and protect its own citizens on the streets of at least one part of its own land. And that simple and brutal fact has ramifications far beyond the shores of Ulster. These will continue, in the short term at least; certainly well into the development of the so-called 'peace process' of contemporary times.

These varying dimensions, and different boundaries, are explored below in terms of the various competences of the state, not in relation to their particular location. Specifically, that means that the political and, for that matter, legal aspects of both regional (county, urban, district) and supra-national (especially European) government are largely neglected in what follows. This is not to deny their importance. It is to suggest that they have their own place. Clearly, the question of local administration (and conversely, of central delegation) has been of enormous significance in British history, once almost a barometer of the changing climates of domestic liberty and tyranny. Perhaps it still is. But it does not illuminate the issue of where in the lives of each of its citizens the state, *tout court*, may legitimately intrude; or where, in fact, it has actually trod.[14] Similarly, the very large matter of European integration cannot fail to engage the mind of anyone concerned, amongst other things, with public interference in private life, now or in the future. But, once again, it is difficult to envisage that the European Commission will conceive of whole new areas for its proper competence, unimagined or unimaginable by the British state. Only the most pessi-

[14] A vast subject which can be done no justice in a brief bibliography. For the national/local dimension, however, it might be worth considering the essays in Ken Young (ed.), *National Interests and Local Government* (London, 1983); and, from another perspective, Michael Harloe, Chris Pickvance and John Urry (eds.), *Place, Policy and Politics: Do Localities Matter?* (London, 1990), *passim*. The large question of finance is treated in N. P. Heyworth, *The Finance of Local Government*, 7th edn (London, 1984), see ch. 3 on 'Government Grants'. Perhaps the best primer remains Howard Elcock, *Local Government: Policy and Management in Local Authorities*, 3rd edn (London, 1994), see esp. chs. 1 and 2. On the vexed question of the relationship between politics and government in the localities, a start can be made in William Hampton, *Local Government and Urban Politics* (London, 1987), part 2.

mistic Europhobe or, conversely, optimistic Europhile could really think that.[15]

The book

This book is a collection of essays on the various aspects of these many and interrelated problems. Contributors were invited to participate in the project solely because the editors believed that they had something to say on subjects about which they are acknowledged experts. In making their choice, the editors envisaged no particular methodological, still less a specific doctrinal, approach. Accordingly, the volume is unashamedly multidisciplinary. It is hoped that this will be to its advantage. At the same time, whatever subsequent interdisciplinary virtues it may display have not been self-consciously wrought. Certainly, no attempt has been made to forge a social scientific synthesis out of such disparate material, and from so many diverging perspectives. None of the contributors was asked to sacrifice the wider purposes or specific conveniences of his own specialist academic discipline for the supposed needs of the whole. And the editors have made no attempt to mould the resulting efforts into a syncretistic intellectual blancmange. What the reader will find are the separate perspectives of economists, political scientists, sociologists and historians exploring as such in areas where they were judged to be especially competent to make a general contribution to knowledge. It is up to the reader alone to determine whether they have, in fact, done so; and whether, too, the editors' organisational indulgence has had a benign or malignant effect on their efforts.

By the same token, it should go without saying that the volume neither professes, nor presumes, any particular political bias. Certainly, no specific line of ideological attack was envisaged. It is doubtful if the editors themselves could have agreed upon one. And it is likely that the value of the work as a whole would have been even less if they had. Thus

[15] On the question of 'Britain in Europe', a beginning can be made in Stephen George, *An Awkward Partner: Britain in the European Community* (Oxford, 1990), see esp. chs. 1, 5 and 6. See also the essays collected in George (ed.), *Britain and the European Community: The Politics of Semi-Detachment* (Oxford, 1992), notably chs. 1 and 3–5. On the future, perhaps see Michael Franklin and Marc Wilke, *Britain's Future in Europe* (London, 1990), a frankly positive account; and James M. Buchanan, Karl Otto Pohl, Victoria Curzon Price and Frank Vibert, *Europe's Constitutional Future* (London, 1990), which, with one obvious exception, contains rather more sceptical readings of the matter. The historical question is introduced in Sean Greenwood, *Britain and European Co-operation since 1945* (Oxford, 1992), see esp. chs. 1–7; and a wider framework still can be found in David Apter, *The Politics of European Integration in the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot, 1993), *passim*.

the reader will find a dozen or more different social and political perspectives in the essays which follow, each of them individually disclosed. This is taken to reflect the realities of the subject matter and the inevitable controversies which it has already stimulated and will continue to invoke. It is also understood to express the diverging judgements of an informed, but inevitably opinionated, multiple expertise. And, finally, it is assumed that the reader will be canny enough to establish each of their biases for himself and, where necessary, to supply his own, suitably salutary, corrective.

For all that, the book does aspire to some degree of coherence. Certainly, it is the fervent belief of the editors that whilst not every conceivable avenue of enquiry has been followed, a sufficient number of the most important (if not necessarily the most obvious) have been addressed, and in a way which has made the pursuit of a broad academic angle at least compatible with the obligation to maintain a steady intellectual focus. Similarly, it is their strong conviction that the duplication of disciplinary perspectives should yield not merely a richer but also a more integrated picture of change in the British state during the past century: of what caused it, and where it now proceeds. In that way, it is hoped that a volume of essays, variously authored by specialists of different expertise, will enable the reader to appreciate more fully than hitherto just what is peculiar in, as well as general to, the formation and development of the state in modern Britain, or about how it has become so much like so many of the other states within the advanced world, but also about how, given its historical legacy, and according to the logic of its own political, social and economic context, it has developed in its own peculiar ways.

To understand the general in the development of the British state is inevitably, even perhaps unconsciously, to contribute towards the theory of the state in a liberal democracy. And if this book makes any contribution to such a theory, that will be to the good. To be sure, it can offer no integrated, nor even coherent, account of the whole phenomenon. But to appreciate the particular more thoroughly is not, necessarily, to subvert the very possibility of such a general theory. It may even have the effect of pushing it further forward. At the very least, it should not be taken for a destructive activity, still less for a trivial pursuit. For in the progressively converging system of states – if not necessarily of economies – which the European Union seems increasingly to be, it might prove salutary to acknowledge, if for no other reason than to be properly prepared against, the individuality of the states' systems which necessarily have constituted and will constitute the basis of that wider organisation. But that, of course, is another question. And

for all its intrinsic merits – indeed precisely because of those merits – it will not be dealt with here.

Plan of the work

The plan of the work follows the logic of the problem and the variety of its implications. Because this is a book concerned as much about the many different ways in which the state has been perceived – identified, described and understood – as about what it has actually done (or failed to do) in modern Britain, the first section is devoted to four quite separate and different interpretations of what might loosely be called the political theory of the state. Of these, that by Dr Harris is primarily concerned with the emergence (or otherwise) of philosophically coherent language to describe the politics of state development; another, by Dr Bentley, about the degree to which that language did or did not envisage the notion of boundaries. Later contributions by Professors Marquand and Skidelsky set out the ways in which such rhetoric envisaged either a wider role, or a more specific agenda, for the activities of government in modern British society.

Part II is devoted to the critical, and unquestionably central, question of the development of the state in relation to the growth and performance of the British economy during the twentieth century. Dr Middleton provides an essential overview. Dr Whiting explores the limits, both administrative and political, of the tax system. Finally, Professor Peden considers the relationship between the economic activity of the state and the growth, or otherwise, of economic knowledge made available to it during this period. The so-called 'welfare state' is approached directly in Part III. Three aspects of its workings are described and analysed here: namely welfare policy, strictly speaking, by Professor Deacon; health, and the growing interventionism which prefaced the National Health Service, by Professor Digby; and finally education, and the putative emergence of a national educational system, by Dr Wooldridge. The more venerable and still important – albeit changing – 'warfare state' is treated in Part IV. Dr Winter explores the general question of the degree to which the waging of two world wars in this century – a state-dominated activity if ever there was one – has helped forge a British national identity. And Professor Townshend provides much needed consideration of the particular case of Northern Ireland, and the effect which the management of political violence has had upon the British state up to the present time.

The last section of the book identifies and describes the significance of the religious dimension of the state. Dr Green outlines the major

implications of the continuing existence of a state church in modern Britain. Dr Wilson examines some of the ramifications of that continuity for the state's nonconformist, but religious, subjects. Finally, Professor Davies traces the changing contours of surely the most profound yet least discussed aspect of the state's involvement in civil society and personal life: the extent to which the state has chosen, and increasingly has not chosen, to reserve for itself the right to end the lives of each of us; and what that means for us all. In conclusion, the editors offer an account of the past development and future prospects of the state in modern Britain. This chapter in no sense summarises the book. Nor does it reflect the views of the other contributors. It is a personal view, albeit the product of the views of two people. It is based partly on what follows; and partly on wider reflection. It has no *ex cathedra* status.